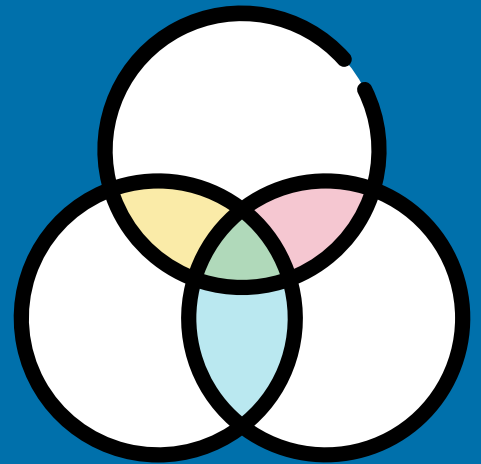


play▲
to●
learn■

Strategies for Cross-Sectoral Programming in Early Childhood Development:

Real-World Examples from
Play to Learn Programs



JUNE 2024



THE PLAY TO LEARN PROJECT

Play to Learn is an innovative humanitarian program from Sesame Workshop, BRAC, and the International Rescue Committee that harnesses the power of play to deliver critical early learning to children and caregivers affected by the Rohingya and Syrian refugee crises. Made possible with the support of the LEGO Foundation, Play to Learn reaches families in their homes, health centers, and play spaces—providing them with the tools needed to foster nurturing care and help children learn and thrive. Partnering with NYU’s Global TIES for Children as an independent evaluator, we are measuring the program’s impact on children’s development and caregivers’ mental health and well-being. By generating tested, scalable, and transportable approaches and educational content, Play to Learn is laying the foundation for transformational change—allowing us to reach generations of children affected by crisis, no matter where they are.

THIS RESOURCE

This resource was created to help curate and synthesize the expertise and insight from practitioners in early childhood development who worked with children and families affected by conflict and crisis under the Play to Learn project from 2018-2024. This resource was developed by Childhood Education International under a consulting agreement with the Play to Learn Project in consultation with Play to Learn partners. This collaborative effort underscores the power of co-creation in addressing the complex challenges of education in emergencies and advancing meaningful change.

The full collection of program resources can be found at the [Play to Learn Resource Hub \(https://sesameworkshop.org/our-work/impact-areas/play-to-learn-resource-hub/\)](https://sesameworkshop.org/our-work/impact-areas/play-to-learn-resource-hub/).

Written by: Childhood Education International

Edited by: Anjali Shivshanker

Designed by: Jennifer Geib {Communication design}



Childhood Education
International

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

The **LEGO** Foundation

Supporting young children’s healthy development requires programming across multiple sectors including health, education, and social protection, however, responsibility for early childhood is often shared by multiple ministries and departments which can make integrating programs a challenge. Coordination of programs across these different government agencies or humanitarian sectors can be complex, but Play to Learn has made great effort to deliver programming that cuts across sectors whenever possible. Below are three core strategies used by Play to Learn partners to promote cross-sectoral programming in ECD in emergency and humanitarian contexts.

STRATEGY 1:

Facilitate coordination across non-governmental organizations (NGOs), agencies, and departments

Play to Learn partners encouraged collaboration across different departments within their own organizations to ensure holistic early childhood programming.

Who & Where: The International Rescue Committee (IRC) Bangladesh’s Early Childhood Development (ECD) staff in Cox’s Bazar and Ukhiya

How: In planning for the implementation of the Gindegi Goron program, the IRC’s ECD staff looked for opportunities to implement the program within health centers or safe spaces. While the onset of COVID-19 ultimately changed the delivery approach of Gindegi Goron, discussions about integration continued, with some integration achieved within the IRC-supported Safe Healing and Learning Spaces in the Rohingya camps.

The team also established ECD corners in the IRC’s offices in Cox’s Bazar and Ukhiya in coordination with the IRC’s internal Women at Work Group. This allowed working mothers to bring their children to the offices and raised awareness around the importance of ECD among staff more generally.

STRENGTHS:

- The IRC’s ECD staff engaged practitioners from other thematic areas within the IRC, providing opportunities for knowledge exchange and cross-training of facilitators from other programs, such as Safe Healing and Learning Spaces and Child Protection.
- ECD staff engaged with education technology staff to provide integrated solutions such as sending automatic early childhood messages to caregivers’ mobile phones.

CHALLENGES:

- Collaboration with other departments within the same organization may get delayed if there are competing priorities. For example, health programming became extremely busy during and after COVID-19, so there was not a lot of time to discuss ECD collaborations, despite interest.
- To do their work effectively, staff funded by Play to Learn needed to devote time and resources to support integration and to engage in conversations with other programs. IRC staff not involved in Play to Learn did not have the time nor resources needed to engage, thus limiting the scope of collaboration.
- For successful implementation, IRC staff working on Play to Learn interventions needed to coordinate effectively with both internal staff (across multiple IRC country offices and sectors) and external partners.



STRATEGY 2:

Coordinate with local- and/or national-level stakeholders

The second strategy Play to Learn partners used was to work with local and national stakeholders, including NGOs and government entities.

WHO & WHERE: IRC Jordan; the Ahlan Simsim team; the Jordan Ministry of Health (MoH); and other local and national stakeholders working in ECD

HOW: In 2021, the Jordan MoH and IRC Jordan began to collaborate on providing parents with more early childhood information—a need identified by midwives. Together they developed scripts and a set of resources to train midwives to share ECD tips with caregivers during routine child wellness visits. Despite initial challenges, the collaborative partnership between the MoH and the IRC resulted in several key achievements:

- A planned expansion of midwife training to an additional 150 midwives.
- Healthcare professionals' job descriptions were altered to add new ECD-related components.
- The quality monitoring checklist used to assess wellness visits now includes a requirement that midwives share early childhood information with parents. The child file from the visit will also document whether early childhood information was shared.
- The MoH has included six hours of ECD content in the annual mandatory renewal training for midwives, nurses, and doctors.

The MoH plans to budget for continuation of this work in 2025-2026.

STRENGTHS:

- IRC Jordan and the MoH shared the same vision—intentionally cultivated through years of building trust. This partnership was based on solving a problem that was identified by the MoH as a core national priority and was within the scope of the IRC's work, creating a joint cause.
- This collaboration was formed with a long timeline—five-plus years—allowing enough time to collaborate on a solution that was framed from the start as owned by the MoH.
- IRC Jordan also participated in the National ECD Working Group, which was a great opportunity to engage and strengthen collaboration with other partners.

CHALLENGES:

- The Ahlan Simsim team did not do a social network analysis early on in Jordan and therefore missed out on building relationships with a few key partners from the onset. While this was later corrected, and relationships were built with key stakeholders that had been missed, it is something the team would do differently in the future.



STRATEGY 3:

Integrate supplemental content across sectors to enhance programming

The final strategy Play to Learn partners used was to enhance programming in one area (such as psychosocial support) with content from another area (such as early learning).

WHO & WHERE: Sesame Workshop and Universidad de los Andes in Colombia

HOW: Semillas de Apego is a community-based psychosocial support program for caregivers that was created and implemented by Universidad de los Andes in Colombia. In 2022, the program integrated the social-emotional learning videos from *Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos*, developed by Sesame Workshop. This integration expanded the focus of the program to include an early learning component.

STRENGTHS:

- The integration of *Watch, Play, Learn* expanded the reach of the program beyond caregivers to children. Using media not only helped to engage children but also encouraged increased interactions between children and their caregivers.
- Participant engagement expanded beyond the planned group sessions to reach other community members through the formation of Facebook groups and online discussions, introducing a new program component.
- By integrating new media content and effectively disseminating information to the wider community, short-term improvements in social-emotional competencies were achieved, aligning with the program's goals.

CHALLENGES:

- The main challenges in reaching caregivers in Jamundí and Tumaco, Colombia, were the poor internet connection and political unrest.
- Engagement rates on Facebook were lower than desired – approximately 50% engagement. Sending reminders and batches of videos on WhatsApp increased engagement rates up to 80%.
- Moderating Facebook or WhatsApp groups was extremely time-intensive, though this allowed caregivers to ask questions and receive support.





**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PLAY TO LEARN,
PLEASE CONTACT:**

| SIOperations@sesame.org
| www.sesameworkshop.org